

Message Text

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S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 AMMAN 6691

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E.O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: FPR LE XF SY

SUBJECT: TALK WITH ZAID RIFAI--TRIP TO LEBANON

1. SUMMARY: IHAD A LONG TALK WITH EX-PRIME MINISTER RIFAI ON NOVEMBER4 FOLLOWING HIS 3 DAY VISIT TO LEBANON AND SYRIA. RIFAI WHO SAW ALL FOUR MAJOR LEBANESE CHRISTIAN LEADERS AND VISITED WITH ASAD, SAID HE CAME AWAY WITH CHANGED IMPRESSIONS ON LEBONESE SITUATION. CHRISTIANS HAVE DE FACTO PARTITION PARTICULARLY AMONG THEMSELVES EACH WITH SEPARATE GOVERNMENTAL APPARATUS ARMIES AND SO FORTH. RIFAI CONSIDERS SARKIS WEAK AND DISINCLINED TO USE ANY ARAB FORCE WHICH MAY BE PLACED UNDER HIS CONGROL TO DO ANYTHING BUT GRADUALLY TRY TO SEPARATE FIGHTING FACTIONS. RIFAI DID NOT SEE MOSLEMS BUT IMPRESSION HAD HAS IS THAT THEY ARE MOSTLY BANDIT TYES. CHRISTIANS ARE MORE WORRIED BY JUMBLATTS PEOPLE,LEFTISTS AND COMMUNIST LEBANESE HOWEVER THAN ABOUT PALESTINIANS WHOM THEY CONSIDER BOTH "FINISHED" AND CONTROLLABLE. RIFAI FURTHER IMPRESSED BY EXTENT ISRALI AID TO CHRISTIANS. HE SAID ASAD WILL NOW SIT BACK AND LET SARKIS ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY AMONG ARABS FOR ANY ACTION TAKEN BY PEACE FORCE, INCLUDING SYRIAN TROOPS. ASAD SEEMS PLEASED WITH HIS SUCCESS IN ACHIEVING AN ARAB IMPRIMATURE AT RIYADH AND CAIRO AND DISINCLINED TO DO ANYTHING TO DISTURB IT. ASAD CLAIMS ANY PALESTINIANS AND IRAQIS IN SOUTH LEBANON HAVE SLIPPED IN AROUND SYRIAN FORCES OF FROM SIDON AND THAT

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SYRIANS APPRECIATE ISRAELI SENSITIVITIES ABOUT PRESENCE OF

PALESTINIANS AND SYRIANS IN SOUTH AND DO NOT RPT NOT INTEND TO PERMIT ACTIONS TO TAKE PLACE WHICH WILL HAND ISRAELIS EXCUSE TO MOVE. END SUMMARY

2. I WAS IN TOUCH WITH RIFAI FOLLOWING HIS RETURN FROM LEBANON AND HAD A LONG SESSION WITH HIM AT HOME ON MORNING OF NOVEMBER 4. RIFAI BEGAN BY DESCRIBING HIS TRIP TO LEBANON FOR ME. HE SAID THAT HE WAS IMMEDIATELY IMPRESSED BY TWO MAJOR FACTORS--SEPARATE CHARACTER OF EACH OF THE CHRISTIAN PARTIES AND THE AMOUNT OF DESTRUCTION (LATER ON HE DID SAY HOWEVER THAT AREAS OF THE CHRISTIAN HELD PORTIONS OF LEBANON UNTOUCHED BY FIGHTING LOOK JUST LIKE PARIS-FACES LATEST FASHIONS ETC).

3. RIFAI NOTED THAT HE HAD GONE IN BY ROAD FIRST TO THE SOFAR AREA THEN IN AMONG THE HILLS AND VILLAGES INTO EAST BEIRUT, VISITED JOUNEH BIQFAYA AND BACK OUT OVER THE BEQA. HE SPEND 9 HOURS DRIVING AND 7 HOURS IN TALKS. HE SAW CHAMOUN, FRAGIEH, PIERREY GEMAYAL AND SARKIS. RIFAI SAID THAT HE FOUND CHAMOUN THE STRONGEST AND MOST POPULAR AMONG THE GROUPS. INDEED GAMAYEL TOLD HIM THAT ANYTHING CHAMOUN AGREES TO HE WILL ACCEPT. NEVERTHELESS RIFAI SAID HE WAS DEEPLY STRUCK BY THE EXTENT TO WHICH PARTITION HAS BECOME AN ESTABLISHED

FACT. THERE IS NOT ONE CHRISTIAN STATE, BUT AT LEAST THREE. EACH CHRISTIAN MINI STATE HAS ITS OWN CUSTOMS, ARMY TAX SYSTEM AND LTOERH ATTRIBUTES OF GOVERNEMENT. HE NOTED THAT THE EXPORT-IMPORT BUSINESS BUT PARTICULARLY IMPORTS SEEM TO BE THRIVING WITH LOCAL LEADERS MAKING A KILLING. HE NOTED THAT JOUNEH IS "CROWDED" WITH SHIPS.

4. I ASKED RIFAI IN PARTICULAR ABOUT SARKIS. HE SAID THAT SARKIS IS OPERATING AND HAS TO OPERATE IN WAYS THAT DO NOT DISTURB OR UPSET THE OTHER LEADERS. ONE OF SARKIS MAJOR MISTAKES ACCORDING TO RIFAI WAS TO ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ARAB PEACE FORCE. SARKIS WILL NOT BE ABLE TO ORDER THE FORCE TO DO ANYTHING SENSATIONAL BUT IS LIMITED TO AN ATTEMPT TO CREATE BUFFER ZONE BETWEEN THE PARTIES. AT THIS POINT RIFAI NOTED THAT THERE WERE SEVERAL CLASHES BETWEEN CHRISTIAN FACTIONS WHICH TOOK PLACE DURING HIS VISIT. EACH CHRISTIAN AREA IS EXCLUSIVE AND THEY ALL HAVE HONOR GUARDS, NATIONAL THEMES, FLAGS AND OTHER ATTRIBUTES OF SEPARATE STATES.

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5. RIFAI NOTED THAT GRANGIEH HAD SEEMED CONFIDENT AND SECURE WITH HIS OWN ARMY OF 4000. RIFAI ADDED WITHOUT BEING SPECIFIC THAT HE IS CONVINCED THAT GRANGIEH HAS "SOMETHING" WORKED OUT WITH ASAD FOR THE FUTURE. ASAD TOLD RIFAI THAT HE IS NOT GOING TO ABANDON THE CHRISTIANS AND WILL CONTINUE TO "WALK ALONG" WITH THEM HAVING STARTED

OUT WITH THEM. RIFAI ALSO SAID THAT HE HAD FOUND CONFIDENCE IN THE

SYRIANS AMONT THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS WITH WHOM HE HAD TALKED.

6. REGARDING ISRAELI COOPERATION WITH THE CHRISTAIN, RIFAI SAID THAT HE COULD NOT HELP NOTICE THE SHERMAN TALKS AND OTHER EVIDENCE OF ISRAELI ARMS ASSISTANCE. HE NOTED THAT BECHIR GEMAYEL HAD BEEN TO ISRAEL FOUR TIMES THAT THE ISRAELIS HAVE REGULAR ARMS DELIVERES COMING INTO JOUNEY (ON A WEEKLY SCHEDULE) AND THAT THEY ARE PERMANENT AND ESTABLISHED COMMUNICATIONS ARRANGEMENTS. IF FACT RIFAI SAYSTHAT WE NO LONGER HAVE ONE ISAEI THE THREE "STATES" IN ARE NOW FOUR ISRAELI STATES IN THE MIDDLE EAST. TO HIM THE FUTURE OF THE CHRISTIANS IS A SIGNIFICANT PROBLEM. HE DOES NOT BELIEVE IT WILL BE SETTLED SOON, AND FEELS THAT MORE FIGHTING WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY TAKE PLACE. SARKIS WILL HAVE A TREMENDOUS JOB IN BRINGING THE THREE MAJOR CHRISTANS GROUNDS INTO ANY LEBANESE STATE AND RIFIA CLEARLY BELIEVESTHAT SARKIS IS NOT UP TO IT. AS FURTHER SIGNS OF THIS PROBLEM IN INTEGRATING THE CHRISNNS RIFAI SAYS THAT NO ONE IS TALKING ENTHUSIASTICALLY ABOUT RECONSTITUTING THE LEBANESE ARMY. INDEED ANY DISCUSSION IS PREDICTED ON A LONG STREGTCH OUT IN THE TIME TABLE FOR SUCH A MOVE. INSTEAD EACH CHRISTIAN LEADER IS TALKING ABOUT THE NEED FOR AN INTERNAL SECURITY FORCE, FOR THE COUNTRY--EACH IS THINKING OF HIS OWN MILITIA AS THE BEST POSSIBLE CANDIDATE FOR THE JOB.

7. I ASKED RIFAI ABOUT ASADS REACTIONS TO THE ISRAELI ACTIVITIES WITT THE CHRISTIANS. RIFAI SAID THAT ASAD IS EMBARRASED BY IT BUT HE CAN DO NOTHING TO STOP IT. RIFAI SAID HE PRESSED ASAD BY SAYING THAT IF HE (RIFAI) WERE A LEBANESE CHRISTIANS HE WOULD WILLINGLY ACCEPT ISRAELI HELP. ASAD RIFAI TOLME MENTIONED THAT HE TOO WOULD

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PROBABLY BE WILLING TO WORK WITH HE "DEVIL" IF IT MEANT ASSURING HIS OWN SURVIVAL. RIFAI CLAIMS THAT ASAD WOULD NEVER HAVE SAID THIS LAST YEAR.

8. I ASKED RIFAI ABOUT THE PALESTINIANS AND THE MOSLEMS. RIFAI SAID THAT HE DID NOT MEET ANY MEMBERS OF EITHER GROUP ON THE MOSLEMS THE CHRISTIANS SEEMS TO BELIEVE THAT THE MOSLEMS GROUPS ARE MAINLY BANDITS AND RIFRAFF. AS FAR AS THE PALESTINIANS ARE CONCERNED RIFAI SAID THAT THE CHRISTIANS DISCOUNTED THEM AS BEING A SERIOUS THREAT AND WERE INSTEAD MORE CONCERNED BY THEIR LEBANESE ENEMIES--JUNBLATT THE LEFT AND THE LEBANESE COMMUNISTS IN PARTICULAR. RIFAI SAID THAT ASAD SEEMS VERY RELAXED ABOUT THE PALESTINIANS AND IS CONVINCED THE PALESTINIANS ARE ALSO PRETTY BADLY SHAKEN AND THAT THE LEADERSHIP MUST CHANGE. RIFAI HASTENED TO ADD THAT ASAD SEEMS TO HAVE NO PLANS FOR HOW THIS IS TO BE DONE OR WHERE THE NEW LEADERSHIP MIGHT COME FROM. RIFAI SAID HE HIMSELF EXPECTS THAT THE PRESENT LEADERSHIP MAY FALL VICTIM TO INTERNAL CONFLICTS IN THE PALESTINIANS MOVEMENT. HE SAID THAT ONE QUESTION FOR THE FUTURE MIGHT WELL BE AS FRANGIEH PUT IT "WHICH SOLE AND LEGITIMATE AUTHORITY IS THE PALESTINIANS MOVEMENT WILL BE THE SOLE LEGITIMATE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PALESTINIANS". IN ANY NEGOTIATIONS OVER THE WEST BANK.

7. RIFAI SAID THAT WHILE THE SYRIANS ARE SITTING TIGHT AND ASAD
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HAS DEFINITELY RESOLVED TO KEEP HIS HEAD DOWN FOR AWHILE. ASAD CLAIMS

HE HAS NOT ALLOWED PALESTINIANS AND IRAQIS TO MOVE INTO SOUTH LEBANON RIFAI SAID ASAD HAS CLEAR APPRECIATION OF THE DANGER OF ISRAELI REACTION TO SUCH A MOVE OR TO A MOVEMENT OF SYRIAN FORCES INTO THE SOUTH. RIFAI SAID ASAD IS HAPPY WITH THE PRESENT SITUATION AND WILL NOT ALLOW IT TO BE DISTURBED. ASAD REPORTEDLY TOLD RIFAI THAT IF THERE ARE PALESTINIANS AND IRAQIS IN SOUTH LEBANON THERE ARE SMALL NUMBER AND THEY HAVE INFILTRATED IN AROUND SYRIAN FORCES OR HAVE COME IN FROM SIDON.

8. ON SYRIAN TROOPS IN LEBANON, RIFAI SAID THAT ARE VERY UNIMPRESSIVE ?7,;#. "IT IS A RAG TAG PEOPLES ARMY. THE DIVISION COMMANDER AT MASNAH I WOULD NOT HAVE AS A DRIVER. EACH ONE HAS A DIFFERENT UNIFORM. THE MAINTENANCE IS AWFUL, WE WENT IN WITH A LARGE ESCORT OF MOTORCYCLES MACHINE GUN JEEPS AND ARMORED PERSONNEL CARRIERS. WE NEVER WHO WOULD ARRIVE AT EACH STOP. IN EACH CASE

IT WAS DIFFICULT .

MANY FELL BY THE ROADSIDE, APCS COULD NOT GO UP HILLS BECAUSE OF POOR MAINTENANCE, THE SYRIANS LOST ONE APC DOWN A REVINE THROUGH POOR HANDLING OF THE EQUIPMENT.

RIFAI ALSO SAYS THAT FOR SYRIANS TO CLAIN UP LEBANON MILITARILY BE BELIEVES THEY WILL NEED AT LEAST TWO MORE

DIVISIONS, THEY MUST OCCUPY EACH VILLAGE. IF THEY DO NOT VEN DATTAS AND LOW LEVEL FIGHTING WILL BREAK OUTM. HE SEES

NO CHANCE THT ASAD WILL TRY

TO DO ANYTHING LIKE THIS. INDEED HE SAID

THAT ASAD HAD JUST GOTTEN HIS OWN INTERNAL SECURITY PROBLEM

UNDER CONTROLL BY ROLLING UP A NUMBER OF IRAQI AND PALESTINIAND CELLS

,
AND THT ASAD WAS SATISFIED TO SIT BY AND SEE NOW WHWAT SARKIS COULD DO.

9. RIFAI MADE THAT THAT HIS VISIT HAS SOLIDIFIED CONTACTS WITH CHRISTIANS AND SYRIANS AND THAT JORDANWOULD CONTINUE TO KEEP A CLOSE EYE ON DEVELOPMENTS.

10. WE SPENT A FEW MINUTED ON THE CIARO AND RIYADH CONFERENCES.

RIFAI SAID THAT HE ELIBES THAT EACH OF THE ARABS STATES GOT

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SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT OUT OF THE MEETING AND TICKED OFF THE GAINS FOR EACH IN TERMS ALREADY FAMILIARY TO ADDRESSEES. HE SAID THAT HE EXPECTS THE EGYPTIAN-SYRIAN RELATIONS TO HOLD UP FOR SOMETIME IN THE FUTURE. BUTTHAT INEVITABLY CONFLITS AND BREAKDOWNS WILL OCCUR AS THE LEADERS FIND AS THEY ARE BOUND TO THAT THEIR SEPARATE INTERESTS CLASH.
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